

Retail Food Environment Index:

The RFEI is a tool that gives a snapshot of unhealthy versus healthy food retail options for an area, which has implications for both a healthy diet and health outcomes. The RFEI counts fast food restaurants and convenience stores, divided by the number of supermarkets, small grocers, and produce vendors (produce stores and farmers markets) to give the ratio of retail food outlets that offer little in the way of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods to those in which fruits and vegetables are readily available.

Increasing evidence suggests that environmental factors, including the food available for purchase in a community - the retail food environment - influences the types and quantities of food that people purchase and consume. Retail food outlets that sell affordable, high quality, nutritious foods can encourage a healthy diet, reducing an individual's risk for chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes. Higher RFEI has been shown to be correlated with increased obesity.

Some studies have found that individuals living near grocery stores are more likely to meet the fruit and vegetable recommendation and are less likely to be obese or have a diagnosis of diabetes. Alternatively, individuals who frequent fast-food restaurants have increased caloric intake while consuming fewer fruit and vegetables but more sweetened beverages, and have higher rates of obesity and diabetes. Although the issues surrounding access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods are complex, the RFEI can start a discussion with communities and policymakers. Further analysis and other community based food retail assessment can be done to better understand the community's access to healthy and unhealthy food and beverages.

Key Findings:

In King County, the food environment varies by location. The RFEI varies from a high of 7 in East Federal Way to .5 in Vashon Island, with the county average at 2.4. This means that there are 2.5 times the fast-food restaurants and convenience stores nearby compared to grocery stores and produce vendors across King County. In general, Health Reporting Areas in the South part of King County tend to have higher unhealthy to healthy food as compared to the King County average. The effect is most pronounced in the HRAs along the I-5 corridor.

Limitations

King County contains very urban, suburban, and rural areas; the geography of each city and health reporting area varies. Due to this varying geography, rural areas with agriculture produce stands may have a low RFEI although residents may still have limited access to other healthy foods. As the data are based on a classification schema, some misclassification may occur; a particular convenience store may sell healthy foods. InfoUSA data are based on survey and may not be a full accounting of all the establishments in an area.

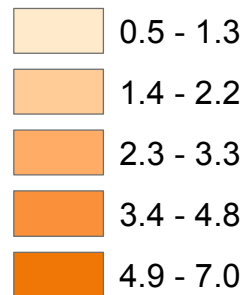
Technical details:

Using the North American Industry Classification System, fast-food outlets are defined as franchised limited-service restaurants where patrons generally order and pay before eating. Food items typically sold in these establishments include hotdogs, burgers, pizza, fried chicken, subs and tacos. Grocery stores with annual sales more than \$1 million were classified as supermarkets, as were those with 5 or more employees and the remainder were classified as small grocers. Produce vendors include fruit, vegetable, and farmers markets.

Retail Food Environment Index by Health Reporting Area King County, Washington

Legend

RFEI



0 1.5 3 6 9 12 Miles



Public Health
Seattle & King County



RFEI is a ratio of fast food restaurants & convenience stores, divided by the number of groceries, farmer's markets, and produce stands. Higher RFEI suggests greater concentration of unhealthy food. The King County average is 2.4

InfoUSA, 2/2010.

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